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CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF ANTI-HERO ODILI SAMALU
IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S NOVEL A MAN OF THE PEOPLE (1966)

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ABSTRACT

A man of the people written by Chinua Achebe is the fourth novel of his constituted Ibo Quartet published in the year 1966. After the publication of this novel Achebe took a hiatus for his next narration. The novel depicts the political scenario of West Africa after independence in satirical way. The political scenario was crammed with corruption and opportunistic activities for the self development despite social development. A political period after an illusionised independence is the central theme of the novel. To be very particular money plays a vital role to hold power and office like Micah Nanga who was meant as "the symbol of corruption". He was the protagonist in the novel since he had money. People completely knew him as a counterfeit; they continued to worship him because of his power and wealth. The story depicts the prominence of money that holds women, people and choices. Odili Samalu is an intellectual turned politician against the Chief Nanga with satirical character is also a weak idealist, who has two roles to play in the novel, one as the anti- hero against the protagonist and other as the narrator of the novel. The novel is presented to the reader from odili's voice.

Keywords: Corruption, Money, Power, triumph, Culture, opportunity

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INTRODUCTION

The novel was set in a fictional postcolonial African State. Achebe depicted many third world war countries 'actual corrupt political condition. The novel portrayed the everyday life of the common people who were affected by the corrupted government. Odili 's introduction is shown as a weak idealist who has biased view over the Chief Nanga . In the beginning his admiration is mixed up with resentment when he meets the minister at school but he changed his opinion at once when he visits the residence at Nagain bori. Odili, nicknamed "diligent" by his schoolmates, is the chief male character and the narrator. He is naive, toffee-nosed, self-centred, and self-congratulatory, providing wonderful opportunities for demonstrating the author's humour and ironic wit. Still, he grows with the book into more of a man than even he conceivably knows. He sneers at his father, although not totally without cause, just as he is about to fall into the clutches of Nanga. Nanga seduces Odili's girlfriend Elsie, he remarks: "Chief Nanga was a born politician; he could get away with

almost anything he said or did." Before he stands up to Nanga on the platform at the end of the novel, he says he aspires to "the heights of symbolic action, a shining, monumental gesture untainted by hopes of success or reward." It is the monumental gesture that results in the severe beating that lands him in the hospital, his heroism a bit stained by our knowledge that he has tried to be the big hero.

With women, Odili is awkward and often prejudiced, edifying his relative immaturity. Yet he is also capable of recognizing truly worthy women when the occasion arises. He fairly draws an estimation of Mrs. Nanga. Yet sometimes this recognition disturbs him, as when he comments that it "unsettles him" when he "finds a beautiful woman who has brains as well." Still, he movingly recounts the plight of his father's younger wives, who must fend for themselves and their children as his father's wealth fall off. Odili nurtures more caring and mature as the book progresses his relationship with his father grows along. It brought about in some sense by the man's obvious integrity in comparison to Nanga and his gang. "I realized" Odili says, "that I had never really been close enough to my father to understand him." Just as he is about to reassess his father, however, he pipes up with some of his usual superficial wit: "it was better left to the tax people."

The Chief Nanga who was once the teacher of Odili Samalu, plays a role of inculcator in his education. Odili Samalu observes Chief Nanga closely and finds out the contradiction between his public behaviour and the personal. This observation made him understand that Chief Nanga is a corrupted politician who has amassed a large wealth like colonizers. After this episode Odili denies the opportunity in civil service and settle down as a teacher in a backwater, that given him some mental peace. One day he was chewing about the eve of Chief Nanga's entry to his village with political power after winning in the cabinet election in a crooked way. Odili thinks over the deceit and the injustice done to the honourable ministers.

Odili admires Nanga before he came to know about him. His view was changed later on when he looks at the actual face behind the mask. Chief Nanga cultureless minister of culture who holds corruption and violence as his soul weapon rules the country. All the evil element of Africa is represented through a single symbol NANGA THE CHIEF. Odili as a narrator adequately explains the gap between the lifestyle of Nanga and the common folk of Africa. Odili completed both his secondary school and university with scholarships. Unwilling to lose the opportunity to Europe for education offered by Nanga he was pushed into the political world.

Odili enters politics as a way to avenge his poor fate with Elsi, He moved against Nanga with a vengeance, who beds his girlfriend Elsie, Nanga was not found with any guilt for seducing Odili's girlfriend. Odili wants to persuade Edna, Chief Nanga's proposed wife, the want to take her away from him as a tit for tat. Apart from culture, money plays a big role in the political life of Nanga and Odili, though Odili was helped by Max and Eunice with their Common People Convention Party, he is not able to spend money like Nanga for election. Odili tells the story, it becomes clear that Chief Nanga does not run through what he moralizes. The money that is to be spent for helping his community is used to his own construction of four-story buildings, which he rents out for his own profit.

The politicians in this novel stand as a go-between the government and the common people but are described by Achebe as the wicked side. Chief Nanga learns to be gluttonous and learns the political diplomacy to win elections through the dishonest system. The important thing for Chief Nanga is the trust that the people have on him. He communicates to them more, because he believes himself nearer to the ordinary man and outlying away from the rational. As Odili narrates the story with strong view that Nanga allows the people only to hear what they needed to rather than all other to protect their culture and way of thinking, and Nanga acts in a ravenous way to cumulate wealth for his life; money, power, and women.

Chief Nanga led his political life in a corrupt way of leading the people by telling them one thing and doing another that eventually brought his reign to an end. Odili began to grow smarter and he became more aware of the corrupt reality. It was not finally realized until he actually had the chance to live with Chief Nanga and witness the way Nanga chosen to abuse his money and power by over-spending it and having his way with the women he looked-for.

Odili just rounds the corner on this situation when he narrates, "We ignore man's basic nature if we say, as some critics do, that because a man like Nanga has risen overnight from poverty and insignificance to his present opulence he could be persuaded without much trouble to give it up again and return to his original state. A man who has just come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes is more reluctant to go out again than another who has been indoors the whole time. The trouble with our new nation as I saw it then lying on that bed was that none of us had been indoors long enough to be able to say, to hell with it. We had all been in the rain together until yesterday."

He goes on to talk about his group of people as chic, lucky and the way they scrambled to the shelter their former rulers left and taken by them in turn. The very commanding metaphor is used here that really makes it clear to the point Achebe is trying to explain. The point is that a person who goes from having nothing (Nanga) to having everything is going to be more disinclined having nothing compared to someone that has had everything the whole time, thus making him more gluttonous to expand authority and more self-protective against giving up this power. Odili accentuates that the new nation was never indoors, but together in the rain, and they desperately needed to experience a little shelter.

Odili's motive to win the election is just to take revenge and to establish that he is closer to the common folk than the "X" minister. When the Chief Nanga successfully wins both the girls whom Odili attempts to have relations with, he was completely shattered to the ground. Nanga firmly tried to prove that in spite of his old age his political power, money, and charming good looks will always win over the younger less powerful intellectual. Nanga raised a tricky question to Odili about his sincere relationship with Elsie. Odili played it off like he did not care and told Chief Nanga that he was not serious about her. It was not until one night that Odili had the idea of nagging up to Elsie's room when he realized Nanga has beaten him to the spot and the competition begins. Nanga justifies his actions by explaining to Odili that the reason he (Nanga) asked him about whether or not he was serious with Elsie. She screams Odili's name, but Odili does not care enough about her to react. If he did care he would have responded. Instead he packs his bags and leaves, and is only mad at Nanga for competition's sake.

This creates a motive for Odili to find his old buddy, called "cool" Max, and to start a new third political party in an attempt to undermine Chief Nanga. However, as Odili becomes more involved in politics he begins to see the corruption within the whole political process. His father is very much against him for attempting to run against the Honorable Chief Nanga, and this creates a controversy between the two men. At one point when Odili has established himself as the voice of the new party, Nanga tries to bribe him to drop out of the election, and Odili refuses. Nanga tells Odili that his friend Max accepted money and Odili couldn't believe it. He later finds out that Max, using his wits, accepts the money to help fund Odili's campaign.

Chief Nanga has intention to obtain as much power as possible and he uses violent and greedy system to obtain this power. He arrests Odili's father at one point, bribes Max and eventually has Max killed, wins out Odili's two girl friends, tries to bribe Odili, and at the end tries to feat Odili in front of the gathered crowd there to listen to his campaign speech. Nanga stuffs ballot boxes and does everything he can with the power he has to suppress Odili's attempt to overtake his position. Nanga makes the people believe that they are so much better off than they would have been under European command that they do not even question Nanga's purpose with all the power and money he has. Odili realizes that the country could be made so much better if the people just knew the facts, but in order to gain the faith of the people he must go up against the man known as "A man of the people".

Odili triumphs over the Minister, however, when a military coup forces his old teacher from office the book ends with the line: "you died a good death if your life had inspired someone to come forward and shoot your murderer in the chest – without asking to be paid."(Cp.13-A MAN OF THE PEOPLE)1966

CONCLUSION

To wrap up, one of the most powerful revelations which dawned after reading 'A Man of the People' was that politics and power requires a lot of money, this is exposed from the story to the world and it is in fact a still living reality. Odili shows both strengths and weaknesses in his character. The change for the better in the

character of Odili is gradual. The noteworthy point about Odili is he doesn't stop himself from functioning within his ability to accomplish self-development in state of affairs where fair play and justice are put under unanswered questions. His moral upliftment is remarkable and realizes that it is his turn to become little muddled to win a dirty war. The progress of Odili from idealism to disappointment convincingly paves the way to recognition of the insensitive reality and possible salvation for the country. The evolution in Odili's character comes around 360 degree as we witness his attitude progressing from distrust to hopefulness.

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